

# Filling the Housing Gap in Silicon Valley

Housing Authority uses creativity, innovation to address an affordable housing crisis



Family Housing Laurel Grove Entrance



Courtyard View N to Family Housing



Housing Authority  
of the County of Santa Clara

Interim Executive Director :: Katherine Harasz  
Location :: San Jose, California

Silicon Valley is known as the hub of the technology industry, which continues to boom and attract high-income professionals to the region. However, for the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara (HACSC), extreme challenges are associated with rising rents for those who do not make enough money to afford them.

"HACSC is not only providing rental assistance to more than 14,000 families, but we also manage more than 30 affordable housing properties that provide affordable rental units to about 2,700 families," says Katherine Harasz, Interim Executive Director of the HACSC. "We are an important resource for affordable housing in an economy where the rental market has gone through the roof. Even people who are earning at or above the area median income are shocked at the rental costs for a one-bedroom apartment."

According to Harasz, rents have increased so much that the problem far outstretches solutions provided by the federal government.

"Right now, we have 1,500 voucher holders looking for an apartment in our county," she says. "About 225 of them are homeless



veterans and they are completely priced out of this market, even with our payment standards set at the maximum the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] allows. One of the few places they are going to be able to find a unit to rent is likely going to be a rental unit funded under the nation's tax credit program."

Despite these unprecedented challenges, HACSC continues to find new and creative solutions to help more people find affordable places to live.

#### 777 PARK AVENUE

One significant example of HACSC's creativ-

ity in the face of adversity is 777 Park Avenue, a \$100 million undertaking consisting of two developments in downtown San Jose. HACSC originally acquired the two-acre parcel in the 2008 recession, but the plans for the property's use have changed significantly since then.

"When we bought the property, it was entitled for 50 percent less density," Harasz says. "However, when presented with the opportunity to develop affordable housing in downtown, where residents would have pedestrian access to transit, parks, entertainment and jobs, we knew we had to maximize the public benefit and increase the density. We added 60 more units and created two separate devel-

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Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara • Laurel Grove Family Apartments, San Jose, CA





opments—a multifamily property and a senior community.”

The two efforts are called Laurel Grove Apartments, an 82-unit community for low-income families, and Park Avenue Apartments, a 100-unit community for low-income seniors. The site is adjacent to the Diridon Transit Station, a major public transit hub with access to Amtrak, CalTrain, light rail and buses connecting the entire Bay Area.

“Both [seniors and families] will benefit from having great access to the transportation corridor,” Harasz says.

#### POCO WAY APARTMENTS

Located in east San Jose, the Poco Way Apart-

ments have housed low-income families since 1965. The area was hit hard by drugs and crime in the 1980s but received a facelift in 1997. Now, HACSC is investing \$44 million in the first major renovation the 130-unit property has seen in decades. Thus far, logistics have presented the most significant construction challenges.

“We need to temporarily relocate families, and we’re in the middle of the school year,” Harasz says. “Managing the logistics of getting kids to school has been a little more difficult than we thought, but we are working through it.”

In addition to updating the 22 buildings that make up the community, HACSC is also converting an on-site laundry room into an informal community policing station—something Harasz says came about organically based on input from the residents and the local police department.

“While outreaching to the residents regarding the rehabilitation and hearing concerns about safety in the surrounding community, the community policing office concept evolved,” she says. “Staff reached out to the San Jose Police Department, who after recently losing their previous community office space, expressed a strong interest in having a new presence in the neighborhood. The space is not intended as a formal police station, but rather a space where police officers can file reports, answer emails, host community meetings and hold open office hours. We’re hoping this will bring an extra level of community participation in the policing of this area.”

The HACSC expects renovations on Poco Way Apartments to be fully completed in May, although some families have already been able to move back in.

“When the folks come back, they are absolutely thrilled,” Harasz says. “I think this will be a new point of pride for the renters and community feeling like they deserve, and now have, the very best.”

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Published by **Affordable Housing News** - WINTER 2015 ©2015 Avenir Publishing, Inc.  
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